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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000582

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [ASEC](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: THE DYNAMICS OF POLITICAL ASSASSINATIONS IN NIGERIA

REF: A. LAGOS 637

[1](#)B. ABUJA 572

CLASSIFIED BY CHARGE D'AFFAIRES RICK ROBERTS FOR REASONS 1.5
(B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: While security in general is at its lowest point in recent memory, many of the recent wave of killings (septel) are attributable to two political trends, one local and one national. The majority of national politics incidents appear to stem from internal disputes in Obasanjo's ruling PDP, while a few were apparently intended to intimidate opposition party leaders whose popular support threatened ruling party interests. The local politics pattern follows the pattern of a politician employing a gang under one rubric or another -- as bodyguards or militia or support group -- and the gangsters pursue his political rivalries by rubbing out those he does not like. The Odua Peoples Congress (OPC) are famous as such gangsters for hire (Ref A), although there are several other organized equivalents around the country generically referred to as "Area Boys." Politics in new democracies can be a blood sport, witness Taiwan's election and fistfights thereafter in its legislature, but the recently accelerated pace of assassinations in Nigeria and the lingering uncertainty over the still contested 2003 elections do not bode well for curbing political violence. END SUMMARY.

THE SETTING

[1](#)2. (C) Nigeria has experienced general sporadic violence for many years as ethnic groups wage intermittent war on each other, armed robbery has become common, and security forces have intervened ostensibly to reduce both while raising their income by shaking down passersby with guns in full display. Politics too has seen such violence, which has waxed and waned as politics have become more and less important under civilian and military governments. Nigeria has become a violent society, with more than enough guns and people who are willing to use them.

[1](#)3. (C) Political assassinations have been used to eliminate challengers both within parties (Dikibo, 2004) and from rival parties (Harry, 2003) as well as to silence critics (Yar'adua, 1996) and intimidate survivors (Kudirat Abiola, 1997). Assassinations have also been simple revenge killings by one member of the political class upon another, at times, instead of having deeper motives. In national level politics, assassinations tend to be aimed at the mid-level of opponents' factions, to camouflage the conflict in a veneer of local violence. Real local-level assassinations are more straight forward, elimination of direct competitors and intimidation of potential protesters, with efforts to hide the reasons generally limited to verbal denials. At all levels, control of party (government) resources is both cause and effect of assassinations.

[1](#)4. (C) Nigerians have exhibited an ingenuity in carrying out political assassinations matched only by their well-known capacity for election rigging (Ref B) and financial fraud. Violent attacks appear to be the method of choice nowadays, but historically Nigerian assassins have utilized poison and mechanical failures too, in attempts to cover the killers, trails. Yar'adua was poisoned in prison, and Obasanjo famously narrowly avoided the needle. The recent wave of killings have mostly been attacks on automobiles passing through rural areas or midnight assaults on the victim's home in town. The most recent death, Yauri's, was originally attributed to a fire and then to a single-car accident, perhaps the work of a more creative and subtle assassin of the earlier mold.

THE NATIONAL TREND

[1](#)5. (S/NF) The recent assassination of PDP South-South Zone Chairman Dikibo provides an instructive look at the "new wave" assassins' methodology. On February 7, Dikibo was

assassinated en route from Port Harcourt to Asaba, in Delta state. Police sources told poloff that Dikibo received a warning on February 5 from "a phone in the Presidency." It appears that a friend of Dikibo working at the Presidential Villa security detail overheard something and attempted to warn him. On the day of his death, the Deputy Governor of Rivers state placed two phone calls to Dikibo, urging him to travel to Asaba that evening. Dikibo had planned to leave early in the day, but was delayed by the unexplained absence of his orderly. When the orderly returned over two hours late, he did so without his motorcycle, which he had regularly parked at Dikibo's residence while traveling. The second of the two calls came just ten minutes before Dikibo died. According to an internal police report, the Deputy Governor wanted to know the precise location of Dikibo: "the village you are in now," according to the transcript of the call. Within minutes, two cars overtook Dikibo who was killed with one shot to the head. Subsequently, Abia Governor Orji Kalu as well as Dikibo's family and friends have alleged that Dikibo complained of threats from "the party," and his attorney says the threats continue.

16. (S/NF) Whether it was the purpose or not, the deaths of Dikibo and Northwest Zone Chairman Yauri removed supporters of VP Atiku from chairing the PDP in two of Nigeria's six zones. PDP Board of Trustees Chairman Tony Anenih will have a free hand to replace them with two of his own men, having largely sidelined PDP Chairman Audu Ogbeh politically. The attack on the governor of Benue (also an Atiku supporter) had the added bonus of eliminating Agom, an anti-Anenih member of the PDP Board of Trustees, putting the pieces in place for Anenih to move from chairing the Board to chairing the PDP as a whole if, as expected, Ogbeh is dumped during the course of the year.

----- LOCAL DYNAMICS -----

17. (C) Kano, Kogi, Osun, Ondo, Anambra, Imo, Kwara, Enugu, and Ogun states have all experienced killings from intra-PDP disputes since 1999. Adamawa, Rivers, Delta, and Plateau, among others, have also seen non-fatal attacks among rival politicians. The predominant factor in these incidents has been the struggle for control of the local party machinery, although political violence in the Delta has always had an ethnic flavor and may be in process to become a rivalry of cartel leaders for control of illicit oil exporting (septel).

18. (C) The recent local government elections provided the opportunity for governors to ensure that the interim chairs they handpicked were given the opportunity to win the full terms in office, sometimes even without resigning from their civil service jobs to run for the office (Ref B). Many members of the various political parties in power believed that party primaries and the general elections should have been open to opposing politicians as well as the "Caretakers," and this difference of opinion became violent in many places. In most cases the victims were, the "Caretaker" local government chairman, his opponent, or an election official deemed to be too close to one or the other of the sides. Kogi and Adamawa states typified this simple pattern.

19. (C) Plateau State showed the pattern at its most complex, with economic, ethnic and religious layers added and the usual gangs serving politicians upgraded into heavily armed militias. Plateau PDP kingpin Solomon Lar, working with the Governor, recruited hundreds of thugs to terrorize largely Muslim Hausa/Fulani herdsmen in Langtang and Shendam LGAs into voting PDP. On the other side, ANPP national officer Jeremiah Useni gathered his own gangs to intimidate mainly Christian Jukun farmers in an area widely believed to have voted for the ANPP in the 2003 elections. Lar and Useni are both Christian. The ensuing clashes fueled an already tense dispute between the herdsmen and farmers, eventually killing upwards of 200 people in the past month.

----- ONE OTHER COMMENT -----

10. (S/NF) While some incidents are surely not related, the political violence inside the ruling PDP also paints a picture for Nigerians of a government that is unstable. If rivals within the government can intimidate through eliminating each other's mid-level supporters, why not eliminate the seniors? Nigeria had a shaky start on the road to democracy in 1999. The flawed contests in 2003 proved that rigging and violence were effective ways to maintain control of the political process. With these early lessons, preparing for 2007 has become a do or die situation for many politicians throughout the Nigerian political class. Efforts at gaining or maintaining control of the PDP in 2004 have translated this literally. The real losers, besides those

who end up dead, are the Nigerians who continue live in fear
of what may come next.
ROBERTS